

Jihadist Ideology: The Core Texts

Together these texts reveal not only the ideological foundation for jihad but also the strategy and tactics. Dr. Sebastian Gorka will provide an overview of these core texts, including their history, evolution and application. Familiarity with and understanding of these texts is essential for anyone engaged in counter-terrorism, from the policymaker to the investigator to the street cop.

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Sayyid Qutb *Milestones*

Abdullah Azzam *Defense of the Muslim Lands*

S. K. Malik *The Quranic Concept of Power*

Ayman Al-Zawahiri *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*

The Enemy Has a Plan

The message of my presentation is a simple one. Firstly, if you want to understand the enemy, as one British policeman put it, “Read what they say.” These individuals are not shy, they like the limelight. The CIA’s Open Source Center, for example, has compiled a huge unclassified collection of what Osama bin Laden has said over the years. Anyone who wants to can read it.

Secondly, we must understand al Qaeda not as something that was created by bin Laden simply on the foundations of the Arab Mujahedeen movement. Rather, Al Qaeda is the product of decades of ideological evolution that started with the Muslim Brotherhood. You could even argue it is in fact the product of centuries of ideological and conceptual evolution going back to the 10th and 11th centuries, to authors such as Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328) and even to the Asharites. But we will focus here on 20th century developments. The point is that you must be able to place al Qaeda in the context of this larger ideological flow.

Thirdly, and this is really tough for government officials and for people who like the kinetic stuff—hunting people down, chasing high value targets— we must stop obsessing on violent jihad, al Qaeda’s (AQ) kinetic strain of warfare. I have built my career on this foe, on understanding and explaining Al Qaeda. However, AQ does not keep me awake at night any longer. I am not afraid of another 9/11. Rather, I am afraid of AQ’s soft jihadist colleagues, those who will not use violence, but organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), who use legal tools, economic tools, and lawfare—law as a weapon—to undermine our constitutional order. That is by far the more difficult threat for us to deal with because our national security establishment is not geared towards this indirect sort of warfare and because we have not yet woken up to the seriousness of this threat. But we have to remember one thing, and this is my fourth point. Both bin Laden, both AQ and organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood have the same objective. They simply use different tools to arrive there. They both wish *sharia* compliance on the United States, a wiping away of the U.S. Constitution and the creation of a global Caliphate. They are on the same team; they simply use different tools to win their fight.

In the next 40 minutes I am going to work through some of the most important ideologues in the enemy’s camp and give you some insights as to how they understand this war, and then I will get to the

“so what?” question. The bottom line is that the enemy has a plan, and he has made no secret of it. It is written out and made clear for all who care to read it. For anybody who works in the national security arena, it is your duty to be familiar with the enemy’s plan, to read and understand those who conceived of the conceptual framework which brought us September 11th, the Fort Hood massacre and the attempted Times Square attack.

Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*

Let us start with Sayyid Qutb, perhaps the most well known of the original jihadi ideologues. Why is he significant? Because his book, *Milestones*, is the roadmap, the justification for events such as September 11th. What is his significance in one sentence? His argument is that the world is heretical, it is to be forcibly cleansed by Islam, and Islam is not to be understood as just a religion. You cannot treat it like Buddhism, Taoism, or Judaism. It is much more than that. To Sayyid Qutb, Islam is a revolutionary party.

Sayyid Qutb

Who is Qutb? Let us put the author into context. He was born in Egypt in 1906. He was trained as a teacher, as a person versed in the educational sciences. He learned the Koran by heart by the age of ten, and then he began his professional career as a civil servant in the Egyptian Ministry of Education. The turning point for him in his gradual radicalization was the time he spent in the United States as an exchange scholar, from 1948 to 1950. Here in the U.S. he spent time in Washington, in California, and most infamously in Greeley, Colorado, where he observed and wrote on the local town dances and saw in them the moral corruption of the United States, its materialism, and its basic heretical nature.

On his return to Egypt in 1950, Qutb was energized to reframe Islam as a divinely ordained political movement that must cleanse the world of its current state of *jahiliyyah*. Now *jahiliyyah* is an important concept from the beginning of the founding of Islam by Mohammed. *Jahiliyyah* simply means a state of pagan disbelief. It was used to describe the tribes living around Mecca who worshipped many Gods, who worshipped statues, idols and so forth. Mohammed’s mission was to remove *jahiliyyah*, this lack of knowledge of the oneness of God, from the Arabia peninsula. Qutb takes this ancient concept of *jahiliyyah* and says: today the 20th century suffers from *jahiliyyah*, from confusion, from not understanding the oneness of Allah, that he is supreme, and it is the job of true Muslims to remove this state of pagan ignorance not only from the Middle East but from the whole world as well. Why?

Because for Qutb it was not simply a question of unfaithful Arab leaders in the Middle East, but it was also a question of the West culturally invading the Middle East, politically invading the Middle East, putting what he saw as puppets onto the thrones of Arab nations. What we need, according to Qutb, is an enlightened vanguard. This is interesting because he clearly took concepts such as “the vanguard” from Communist ideology. Therefore do not treat the Jihadist ideology as *sui generis*, something that is unique and by itself. No, writers such as Qutb and even people before him such as Mawdudi in Pakistan (or India as it was), saw the power of other western totalitarian ideologies. It is this ironic absorption of western concepts that otherwise would be deemed to be heretical and anathema into their new religiously framed ideology that makes Islamism a *hybrid totalitarianism*. Today’s ideology of Global Jihad is therefore not simply a totalitarian man-made construct like Communism or Fascism, but one divinely-framed, and therefore a hybrid concoction.

Concepts key to Qutb’s dozens of books include the idea of global social justice as possible only through Islam: Islam’s mission is to free all men from the tyranny of other men. It is a global and universal mission. What does that mean? It means that humankind must be “liberated” from political

systems run by human beings and from laws created by human beings. In other words, Qutb believed human kind must be liberated from systems such as our own here in the United States, with its man-made laws. Democracy is run, as Lincoln told us, by the representatives of the people for the people. Democracy therefore cannot be *sharia*-compliant, for democracy represents a rejection of Allah's Koranic law. As a result it must be destroyed. Islam's mission is universal, Islam is a political movement that uses violence. Jihad, according to Qutb, is not offensive but defensive. This is an important distinction that echoes in later writers like Abdullah Azzam, and I will get to this point in a moment when we discuss bin Laden's erstwhile boss.

Islam, according to Qutb, is a divine liberation to be realized through jihad. We must return, therefore, to the ways of the first generation. We must return to follow the behavior, the patterns of thought, and law, and systems that were Mohammed's Islam.

Some quotes from his most famous book, *Milestones*: Islam is "ordained for the whole of mankind." It is the "last message for humanity. We must return to the clear spring, the source that is the Koran and the Hadith, unsullied by Roman, Greek, Persian concepts such as democracy." So he is saying they must remove the influence of Islam from western concepts such as Roman law, Greek philosophy and so forth. Only that which comes from the Koran and the collections of writings about Mohammed's life, the Hadith, is pure. Islam has lost its way—meaning Islam as a community has lost its way. This holy text, the Koran, must not be deemed to be theoretical. That is important: the Koran is a guide to praxis. It is like what we would call an FM, a field manual. It is not something for scholars to debate at al Azhar University, it is a guidebook for life. It must be understood in practical terms, not theoretical terms.

Islam is a movement that will return Muslims to the correct path and away from *jahiliyyah*. The mission "is not to compromise with the practices of a *jahiliyyah* society or pagan society." This is important if you think about immigration and the troubles we are seeing in Western Europe. Qutb writes, "We cannot be loyal to a society that suffers from *jahiliyyah* or paganism. Our aim is first to change ourselves so that we can change society. We will never compromise." "No political system of earthly power should hinder Islam. If someone does hinder Islam's spread then it is Islam's duty to fight that person until he is killed or until he declares his submission." This is a very important declaration. Hindering Islam could mean anything in practice. It means if anyone prevents Islamic proselytizing, that individual must be fought until he is killed or until he submits to the will of Allah. This is a theme that is echoed in the other ideologues we are going to discuss. Obstructing proselytizing is understood by Qutb and today's jihadists as the initial aggressive act, one which justifies defensive jihad.

Abdullah Azzam, *The Defense of Muslim Lands*

Let us move on. Who is Abdullah Azzam? Abdullah Azzam is really the creator of al Qaeda. Abdullah Azzam is the mentor, the former boss of bin Laden. He was the founder of something called the MAK, the Arab Service Bureau, which bin Laden would turn into al Qaeda after Azzam was assassinated. Azzam was born in occupied Palestine in 1941 and he is important in the constellation of Jihadist ideologues in part because of his credentials. Unlike Qutb, unlike al-Zawahiri, a ministry official and an MD, Azzam had a PhD. from Al Azhar University in Islamic Law. This is very important in the culture of Islam. Do you have theological credentials? When bin Laden issues a *fatwa* he does not actually have the authority to do so because he is a business graduate. This is not something we think of as a powerful vulnerability, but it is. Abdullah Azzam was one of the ideologues who was truly credentialed to make theological justifications for jihad.

Azzam's contribution to the Jihadist canon of ideology is that he took jihad and he made it into an international brand. He is the Steve Jobs of jihad. He took Islamic Holy War and made it into a globally recognized brand like Apple. After the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979, Azzam traveled the world recruiting people to fight in the jihad against the heathen Russian infidels in Afghanistan. He was so successful that he managed to rally Muslims of all nationalities to Afghanistan to fight with the Afghan Mujahedeen.

His most important concepts are contained in his monograph-length *fatwa*: *The Defense of Muslim Lands*, approved by the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia. This is not just some fringe individual, some kook hanging out in the Tora Bora region. This is a man who, when he writes a *fatwa* of seventy pages, receives approval from one of the most important religious authorities in the country of the two holy sites, Mecca and Medina. So this jihadi ideologue has official backing for what he says. His key ideas include the mythical theme of failure and rebirth in Islam. Failure happens in Islam, why? Very simply, because Muslims have lost their way. If they get back onto the right track they will vanquish their enemies. Why have they gone from having a great Caliphate, from having the Ottoman Empire, to having the first ever university (in Baghdad). How do they fall from these heights? The explanation is simple: Muslims have strayed from the path of true Islam and this is Allah's recompense. They will be unsuccessful as long as they remain untrue, according to Azzam. In order to be powerful again, they must return to the true path, they must return to the essence of Islam.

Here it is very important to understand the concept of abrogation in the writings of Azzam and many others. This is a core concept in Islam. Azzam's writings clearly demonstrate how abrogation is used. When you hear people say, "When Bin Laden quotes from the Koran, he is just cherry-picking, he is just picking bits he likes for himself to justify violence. That is not true Islam." Well, that is not how the Koran works. In truth, the Koran is a very contradictory book. It can say things in one *sura*, or verse, which are completely opposed in another *sura*. Islamic Jurisprudence understands that this is a serious problem. How can an eternal, uncreated, holy text contradict itself? The answer that was manufactured to alleviate this potential time-bomb within Islam is abrogation. Behind abrogation is that idea that divine revelation was given to Mohammed in stages, stages reflecting the context in which Mohammed was building his empire and building his religion. So when Mohammed begins to teach about this religion but is still politically weak and not recognized by the tribes in Mecca, and wanted also to win over Jews and Christians, the verses of the Koran are more conciliatory. Then he is invited to Yathrib, to what will be Medina. His message finds fertile ground there, his religious nation begins to grow and he returns in force not just to persuade but to conquer. Then we have the violent Medinan *suras*, the so-called sword verses:

But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. (Koran, Sura 9.5)

Fight against those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued. (Koran, Sura 9.29)

So Mohammed did not advocate violence at the beginning of Islam's establishment, because by necessity of his position of weakness, he had no other choice. These are the peaceful verses of the

Koran. When he finally goes to Yathrib, when he is recognized as a prophet and starts to build a mass-base, he becomes a very powerful military leader and returns to Mecca triumphant. That is when the sword verses are “revealed.” That is when he can talk about violence. The Koran’s eternal truth is thus a victim to Mohammed’s specific context in time. This is how the principle of abrogation was born to explain inherent contradictions in the text. If a verse comes later chronologically in the Koran it supersedes the verse that contradicts it. So when bin Laden quotes later *suras*, famously violent ones, such as 9.29, it is not because he is being selective. It is because he is reflecting the later truth of Mohammed’s revelation—the later context of power, the use of jihad, the need for violence to spread Islam. And if you understand abrogation you understand how these quotes are used by jihadists today. The fact is that in the evolution of Islam, the later violent years trump the concepts of the weaker early years—permanently.

In *The Defense of Muslim Lands*, Azzam defines jihad as a devotional act which is obligatory. This is the last and most important aspect of Azzam’s work. Azzam said jihad does not have to be declared by a Caliph. You do not need to have a head of state give you permission to fight the enemy. He goes even further and says it is an individual obligation (*fard ayn*). Jihad is not something you have to do collectively when a leader gives you permission thanks to the invasion of Afghanistan. It is an individual obligation.

Azzam does something that is very unusual in Islam. He says you do not even have to ask your father, you do not have to ask your husband, you do not have to ask anybody’s permission. You simply have to wage jihad. You do not need clerical approval; you do not need a head of state to say, “Now I declare holy war.” You must do it even if you are a slave and your master forbids it. You must do it if you are poor or if you are rich. Whoever you are, it is a universal and individual obligation.

Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner*

Let us move on to perhaps the most well known individual amongst the ones we are going to cover today, and that is the person who is deemed by many analysts to be the real heart of al Qaeda, to be the center of gravity for this organization. Not bin Laden. Bin Laden is the charismatic leader, but the man who provides bin Laden his context, his theological underpinnings, with his arguments. That man is Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Who is this man? Again, Egypt is important. He comes from a well known family. Al-Zawahiri is a qualified surgeon, member of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the founder of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad. He is bin Laden’s number two or perhaps he is Al Qaeda’s number one, ideologically. No, this is not some poor man who grew up in a Palestinian refugee camp. This man’s family is important. On his paternal side his grandfather was the imam of the Al-Azhar mosque in Cairo. His maternal grandfather was the President of Cairo University and the Egyptian Ambassador to Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. His grandfather’s brother was the first Secretary General of the Arab League. This is not a fringe individual. This man comes from a very powerful and influential family.

Al-Zawahiri’s formative years were shaped by the Muslim Brotherhood’s fight against the secularist Egyptian system, against leaders like Nasser. In his book *Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner*, which is less of a *fatwa* and more a memoir of sorts, he explains how his radicalization occurred, how he was shaped by understanding Arab leaders as pharaohs, as secular puppets of the West and how he was shaped by the treatment that was meted out against him by the Egyptian authorities when he was arrested as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and tortured in prison. After he was released from prison in 1984, he returned to Pakistan where he was doing charity work as a doctor. Who was he

doing it for? For the mujahedeen. He was doing it for the victims of Afghanistan. Seeing what was happening to his co-religionists in Afghanistan in the 1980s was formative in his radicalization.

For Ayman al-Zawahiri, democracy is the new enemy and jihad is the tool to realize the Islamic State. His significance as the head of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad lies in the consequences of his meeting Osama bin Laden and their creating a marriage of convenience between an organization that was *salafist* and parochially jihadist – in the Egyptian context, fighting the Near Enemy – and an organization, such as al Qaeda, that was *Wahhabist* and is about the Far Enemy, about Global Jihad. Here we have a confluence of two methodologies, two contexts, the local theater and the global. And this is why al Qaeda, the organization that develops later, is so influential in redefining the Near Enemy versus the Far Enemy.

Knights Under the Prophet's Banner was completed around the time of 9/11 and smuggled out in October of 2001 to London where it was published in a Saudi newspaper, serialized over a period of days. AQ understands information operations. Zawahiri had a whole book ready, so that when Special Forces and CIA units deployed into Afghanistan, everybody could read in English what Zawahiri had to say. Key concepts of his seminal work begin with the statement that human beings cannot be sovereign. Sovereignty is Allah's alone, therefore democracy must be destroyed as it posits man's sovereignty over man. Democracy is nothing more than a pagan religion. It is a form of *jahiliyyah*. Secondly, the line between internal and external enemies is an illusion. The near enemy is a tool of the far enemy. For example, the King of Jordan is not an internal enemy, he is not a near enemy, but just a puppet of America. There is no distinction between the two, they must be understood as a whole: the enemy is everywhere. Thirdly, the battle for Islam must go global. All Muslims must engage. The message is clear from the very title of Zawahiri's book: *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*. Muslims must all unite under one flag and not the flag of one nation but the flag of the last true prophet. Rulers who defy Islam must be exposed, and all Muslims must be held responsible for defending Islam. It does not matter if you are living comfortably in London, Berlin, or Minnesota—as a Muslim you are responsible too. Without a Caliphate or Muslim super-state there cannot be victory. At the end of his book Zawahiri states, “In our means, methods, and resources we must combine patience with infliction of mass casualties and the best method to do this is suicide attacks.” “This confrontation with Islam's enemies must be to the last drop of blood.”

Brigadier S.K. Malik, *The Quranic Concept of Power*

Now from the most famous jihadi thinker to the person you probably have not heard of, or at least who most people have not heard of: Brigadier S.K. Malik. I cannot show you a photo because not even that supercomputer, Google, could find me one. Malik was a member of the Pakistani Army. That is all we know, and the fact that he wrote a very important book. This book is the *The Quranic Concept of Power*, published in 1979.

Let me summarize why this man is important to you. Imagine walking into Borders or Barnes & Noble and seeing a book written by Gen. David Petraeus, with a foreword by a member of the Supreme Court of the United States, and the preface by none other than President Obama. Probably an important book, right? Well, that is *The Quranic Concept of Power*. It was written by a serving General, with the foreword by the Advocate General of Pakistan, and a preface by none other than General Zia Haq, who was not only the Commander of the Pakistan Army but also Pakistan's President from 1977 to 1988. You may not have heard of Malik, but just think about the people who endorsed his book: a person who represents supreme justice in Pakistan and the individual who is the head of state and commander. So it is an important book. The preface by the Advocate General is thirteen pages long and is almost as

important as the rest of the book. Let us look at some of the concepts in the preface and the concepts of General Malik.

This is the only modern book authored by a Muslim that deals with war at the strategic level and which combines military theory with divine theological explanation. This is not von Clausewitz. This is not the art of war in any western sense. This is the science of warfare as ordained by Allah. It is non-western and very difficult for us to mentally compare to our strategic paradigms, but that makes it all the more important for us to understand. Think of it as a hybrid of von Clausewitz's *On War* and a book on End Times evangelization all wrapped up together. The work does not, therefore, fit into our world view or categories.

Additionally its significance lies in its advocacy of terror as a weapon willed by Allah. Malik is very clear on this: the center of gravity is the soul of our infidel enemy. It is the enemy's faith, and the best tool ordained by Allah to destroy our enemy's soul is terror. So we have a serving General in the Pakistani Army telling us that 9/11 is the way to wage war. War today is not to be understood in terms of western strategic concepts such as Land Air battle. It is not Fire and Maneuver, or nuclear deterrence. It is 9/11. It is terror. According to Malik, striking terror in the soul of the enemy is the most effective divinely ordained weapon they have to use against their enemies. Destroying the faith of the enemy is the object of war, according to Malik, and Jihad is the tool. To illustrate his point, Malik described numerous battles that Mohammed engaged in, along with other conflicts in the history of Islam.

From General Zia's foreword once can also garner other key messages of the book: "All Muslims must play a role in jihad, which is a collective responsibility of the whole Muslim *ummah*, not just soldiers." Remember, this is from the President of Pakistan. The Advocate General wrote in his foreword, "The purpose of war in Islam is to serve God's divine purpose. Jihad is waged to establish Allah's supremacy." Think about how sharply this contrasts with how we teach war at our academies and our war colleges. War serves the purposes of the state for us. We teach von Clausewitz's dictum that war is a continuation of politics by other means. This book says the very reverse: "Jihad is the duty of the believer to carry Allah's message forward." If a person is trying to move the message of Islam forward and he is obstructed in that effort, he is entitled to retaliate. What does that mean in plain English? How do you explain that in simple words? It means violence is required if you cannot proselytize. If someone obstructs the spread of Islam, that is an act of war. If Muslims cannot spread the word of Allah war obtains. That is most definitely not how we understand war. For Christians and Jews, spreading our divine message is an indirect non-kinetic issue. We do not proselytize at the end of a gun, not least because we have learned it does not work, aside from the theological and moral indefensibility of it from a Judaic or Christian viewpoint. For the jihadist, spreading Islam and having someone obstruct you in that process is an attack on Islam. Therefore you are already in a defensive posture and nobody has used a gun on the other side. War is thus triggered simply because the other does not want to be a Muslim.

The divine context of war as explained by the Koran is predicated on the spread of justice. "Faith in Allah must be altogether and everywhere. Jihad is a continuous and never ending struggle waged on all fronts including political, economic, social, psychological, domestic, moral, and spiritual." Is that how we understand war? The last front, spiritual, is where Malik is most controversial and this is where he starts to talk about terror as the center of gravity. For Malik, war is an activity aimed at the human heart, at man's soul, at his spirit, at his faith. That is not how the West teaches war. Take out the enemy's general staff, establish air supremacy, put boots on the ground, those are the kind of things we understand under war. But for Malik, war is about attacking the human heart, man's soul, his spirit and

faith. Echoing Sun Tzu, he observes that peace is simply the preparation for war and is vastly more important than the activity of fighting. What you do in peacetime to prepare is much more important than the kinetic violent actions of shooting people and blowing things up. What are the consequences of this statement? This means that Islam is perpetually at war and that peace is simply the preparation for war.

For General Malik, for his patrons and acolytes, jihad is clearly a holy war for both sides of the engagement. When they say they are fighting a holy war, the conventional wisdom is to just say that that is their distortion. But if our enemy is aiming at our faith system, if they are aiming at our souls, it is de facto a holy war on our side as well because that is what the enemy has chosen to destroy.

Conclusion

What are we to conclude from all of this? Why are these four writers important? Here is the take-home: AQ is just a small part of a much larger and older movement. That movement has a plan to destroy our system using all means from the list given by Malik, not just violence. This includes political and economic warfare and very sophisticated and fast information operations. This conflict that we are in now, in our tenth year, is potentially more deadly and more dangerous than the Cold War, because the enemy is totalitarian, but he is not a secular godless totalitarian like Hitler or Stalin. This totalitarian has Allah on his side.

The sad truth is that we seem to be going backwards. Take just these three quotes from the 9/11 Commission report:

- Our enemy “is sophisticated, patient, disciplined and lethal.”
- “[T]he institutions charged with protecting our national security did not understand how grave this threat could be, and did not adjust their policies, plans, and practices to deter or defeat it.”
- “In short, the United States has to help defeat an ideology, not just a group of people.”

I am told that the U.S. Government’s policy now is to see our salvation in negotiations with people like Qaradawi, to engage the Soft Jihadists. If that is the Intelligence Community’s strategy and White House’s answer, then we have already lost. If people who are the seminal clerical advocates for Jihad for the Muslim Brotherhood and the lead clerics for Al-Jazeera are going to be our saviors then we have surrendered. If you do not want to give up, remember this. This is what we have to understand. There are violent Jihadists and there are non-kinetic Soft Jihadists. There is AQ and there is the OIC and the Muslim Brotherhood. They are taking different pathways to the same destination: the imposition of *sharia* law wherever they can make it happen and to the creation of a Caliphate. Both groups believe in Jihad. Both groups are driven by the objectives Qutb, Azzam, Zawahiri and Malik espoused. They simply represent two faces of the same foe, an enemy whose doctrines and strategies we must begin studying in earnest.